PRAGMALINGUISTIC FEATURES OF SPEECH ACTS IN CONTEXT

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Abstract: This study investigates the pragmalinguistic features of speech acts as they function within various contextual settings. Using corpus analysis combined with pragmatic theory, the research scrutinizes how context influences the interpretation and realization of speech acts. Data drawn from everyday conversational exchanges and formal interactions reveal patterns and strategies speakers utilize to convey intentions effectively. The findings contribute to better understanding the interplay between linguistic form, pragmatic function, and situational context, enhancing applied linguistics, intercultural communication, and language teaching.

Key words: pragmalinguistics, speech acts, illocutionary force, contextual variation, politeness strategies, pragmatic competence, indirectness, pragmatics, language use, intercultural communication

1. Introduction

Speech acts, as defined by Austin and his foundational work on performative utterances [1:4], and further developed by Searle's classification [5:15], refer to the actions performed through language, such as promising, requesting, apologizing, or asserting. The pragmalinguistic approach combines pragmatics and linguistics to understand how meaning is constructed and conveyed via speech acts considering both linguistic features and contextual variables [7:31]. Context plays a crucial role in shaping the form and effectiveness of speech acts, as the same utterance can perform different functions depending on situational factors, participants' roles, and cultural norms.

The present article aims to analyze the pragmalinguistic features of speech acts in different contexts. It explores how speech acts are adapted by speakers to align with social

norms and communicative goals and how contextual cues help interlocutors interpret intended meanings. This study contributes to pragmatics by bridging theoretical models with real-world language use, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between language form, function, and context.

2. Methods

1. Data Collection. The research uses a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. Data consist of recorded conversational interactions from two corpora: (1) a corpus of informal daily conversations among native English speakers, and (2) a corpus of formal workplace dialogues. A total of 150 speech acts were identified and categorized.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data analysis, a systematic coding scheme was developed based on established speech act classifications and politeness frameworks. Two trained annotators independently coded the speech acts for their illocutionary force, linguistic features, and contextual variables such as setting, participant roles, and cultural markers. Inter-coder agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, yielding a high level of consistency ($\kappa = 0.87$), which indicates that the coding process was both rigorous and reproducible. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, ensuring that the final dataset accurately reflected the pragmatic nuances of the interactions.

2. Analytical Framework. The analysis is grounded on Searle's taxonomy of speech acts — assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations — within a pragmalinguistic framework that places strong emphasis on the role of context [5:22]. Contextual factors such as physical setting, social relationships, power dynamics, and cultural backgrounds were coded for each instance [4:46].

3. Procedure. Each speech act transcript was examined for linguistic features including modality, politeness markers, verb forms, and illocutionary force indicators. These were then analyzed in relation to the context to identify patterns of adaptation and pragmatic strategies employed by speakers [2:77].

3. Results

1.Variation of Speech Acts Across Contexts. The analysis shows significant variation in expressing speech acts depending on the context. For example, requests in informal settings often employed direct forms ("Pass me that"), whereas formal contexts favored indirectness and politeness ("Could you possibly pass me that?") [6:89].

2.Use of Politeness Strategies. Politeness emerged as a key pragmalinguistic feature mediating speech acts, particularly in directives and refusals. Speakers adjusted their language to manage face needs effectively, often employing hedges, modal verbs, and softeners to maintain social harmony [2:101].

3.Contextual Disambiguation of Illocutionary Force. Contextual cues such as shared knowledge and physical environment helped interlocutors disambiguate illocutionary force. Ambiguous utterances were often clarified by non-verbal signals or further verbal elaboration, highlighting the interactive dimension of pragmalinguistic competence [4:62].

4. Analyses

The results of this study confirm that the pragmalinguistic features of speech acts—particularly illocutionary force—are highly sensitive to the communicative context, aligning with core assertions in pragmatics literature [3:34]. The adaptation of linguistic forms such as modality, politeness markers, and indirectness allows speakers to negotiate meaning and social relationships effectively.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights how illocutionary force is often conveyed indirectly, requiring interlocutors to rely on contextual factors for accurate interpretation. This interactionist view challenges simplistic form-function mappings, pointing instead to the speaker's intention and environment as critical determinants of meaning [7:31].

In terms of practical implications, these findings stress the importance of incorporating context-aware pragmatic instruction in language teaching. Learners must understand not only grammatical forms but how those forms function to express varied illocutionary forces in different social settings.Lastly, this research suggests fertile ground for expanding pragmalinguistic studies to multilingual and intercultural contexts, where

overlapping and conflicting norms for speech acts can generate misunderstandings, underscoring the need for nuanced pragmatic competence in global communication.

4. Discussion

The findings corroborate previous research highlighting the interplay of language, context, and social norms in shaping speech acts [3:34]. The pragmalinguistic approach allows a nuanced understanding beyond the utterance level, revealing how speakers strategically employ language to negotiate meaning and social relations.

The variations observed indicate that understanding speech acts requires considering the interactional setting and cultural expectations. This has implications for language teaching, intercultural communication, and AI language processing, where context-sensitive interpretation remains a challenge.

Limitations include the relatively small corpus size and restriction to English-speaking contexts, suggesting future research should explore multilingual and multicultural variations to deepen pragmalinguistic theory.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that pragmalinguistic features of speech acts are deeply context-dependent, modulating linguistic form and illocutionary force to fit communicative goals and social environments. Enhancing awareness of these features can improve communication competence across different contexts, facilitating more effective and appropriate language use in diverse settings.

Moreover, understanding the dynamic relationship between speech acts and their contextual factors is essential for language educators and learners alike. By incorporating pragmalinguistic insights into teaching curricula, instructors can better prepare students to recognize and produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate. This not only promotes clearer and more successful communication but also helps prevent misunderstandings that arise from misinterpreting illocutionary force or ignoring situational nuances. Future research should continue to explore these relationships across

different languages and cultures to further enhance pragmatic competence on a global scale.

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